

Purpose In Problems (Matthew 14:22-33)

One of the things we're honest about here at St. Jacobi Congregational Church is the Christian life. We're honest about the difficulty of sometimes living the Christian life. We don't gloss over it. Becoming a Christian is easy; living like one is not. We trust Christ, all he is, and all he has done, and we are children of the living God. Becoming a Christian is that easy—**repent and believe!**

But there are times after that moment when life is tough. Things don't always go our way. Sometimes people still treat us badly. And sometimes we still treat others badly. We even do things that we instantly regret. And, at times, things seem to happen to us for no apparent reason whatsoever.

So, considering that, here's the question I want you to consider this morning. Is there any redeeming value to problems, troubles, and fear in our lives? Let me start to answer that question by saying, we know that God is

sovereign. And we know that he is all-knowing. So, that means there's nothing happens that God does not know about. He knows all future events that will take place. That includes all future events in our lives. So, he knows when our hard times are coming and when we get into them.

So, why does he let them happen? What can God possibly accomplish through our bad times? What can God be thinking by letting us suffer hard times? Does he even care that we are going through this stuff?

There's a story in the Bible that gives us a glimpse into answers to our question. It's a story we've looked at before. And we're going to look at the same story from a slightly different angle than before. The story is in our Scripture reading that we heard earlier. Let's talk through this story.

There was a pretty big event right before this story. Jesus had just fed at least 5,000 people with five

loaves of barley bread and two fish. That had to be an

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awesome event to have witnessed, don't you agree? And the disciples were right in the middle of it. They took the food to the people as Jesus multiplied it. Verse 21 gives us the 5,000 people number.

Verse 22 says immediately Jesus put the disciples in the boat. As soon as they had witnessed a huge miracle, Jesus put them in a boat. He stayed behind to pray. Meanwhile the boat ran into a storm. It must have been terrifying. They got into the boat before evening came. And verse 25 says they didn't see Jesus until the fourth watch. That's Roman time for between 3 and 6 am. So, they had been fighting the storm for somewhere around 9 to 12 hours!

Sometime in that fourth watch, they saw Jesus walking on the water. They were so scared by that time they thought they were seeing things—a ghost,

perhaps. But it's Jesus. the Son of God, overcoming the laws of physics.

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We all know what happens next: Peter got out of the boat and walked on water, too. As he headed toward Jesus, he lost focus and started sinking. All Peter can do is scream out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus does. Jesus and Peter got into the boat, and as soon as they stepped in, the storm stopped; totally and completely.

There was nothing left for the disciples to do. They worshipped Jesus. They became acutely aware of who Jesus was: the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the controller of the forces of nature. They were in awe of him. So, let's take all of this and get back to our question of the day. Is there any redeeming value to problems, troubles, and fear in our lives?

Sometimes Jesus puts us in tough situations. Let's look at verse 22 again. "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side." The disciples didn't have a choice about getting in the boat. Jesus, who is fully sovereign

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and fully God, knew what the future would hold. Jesus made them get into the boat.

What can we learn from this? Sometimes, Jesus puts us in places of weakness or trouble, so we can see him in ways we might not otherwise see him. The disciples were about to learn things about their Lord that they could not have learned otherwise. They could see the great things of Jesus in the great miracles. They could see the great things of Jesus in the healings they saw. They could see the great things of Jesus in the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. But their knowledge of him would still be incomplete.

They had to see the great things of Jesus when the world was falling apart. They had to see that he still cared when they were about to die. They had to see that he could go to great measures to deliver them in times of trouble. They had to see that he was there for them in good times and bad.

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There are some things we can't learn about our Savior until we're in trouble. When everything is going good, we understand Jesus is awesome and wonderful. It's in the hard times that we find out Jesus is not only great and wonderful, but that he truly cares and is still with us. He'll walk on water to be with us in trouble. He'll put himself in our storms of life so that we don't sink alone.

Trouble brings us to the end of ourselves. The disciples had been fighting the storm for maybe up to 12 hours. Twelve hours of getting nowhere. Twelve hours of energy-sapping fighting. They must

have been worn out. They must have realized that there was nothing more they could do. The thought must have crossed their minds that it was all over.

Jesus could have come out to them much earlier. He could have come within the first five minutes of the storm. But he didn't. He chose to wait. He chose to let them exhaust all their physical resources. He

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chose to let them get to the point where they had no chance on their own. And then he came.

Sometimes we let our good get in the way of God's best. We handle things in our own way. We think we've got it figured out and act in our own strength. We've got it all under control.

But there are times when we get in over our heads. We've tried everything and nothing gets better. It only gets worse and there's not a thing we can do. It's in those times when Jesus shows up that we learn something we can never know otherwise.

Jesus can take the worst situations and make something good out of them. He can take our biggest screw-ups and redeem them. We learn that no matter how bad we mess up or how bad other people mess us up, Jesus can still take all of that and make it right. He can be trusted in the worst of times just as much as in the best of times.

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Trouble causes us to focus on Jesus. Even as Jesus showed up, Peter's troubles were about to get worse. We sometimes talk bad about Peter, but he's the only guy who gets out of the boat. But Peter loses his focus. He takes his eyes off Jesus for just a second and he starts sinking. He's about to drown. His survival instincts kick in and he does the only thing he knows to do. He screams out to Jesus in the middle of the storm: "Lord, save me!"

It's sad to say, but many times, when things are good, we have a tough time focusing on Jesus. As

long as things are rolling along nicely, we're pretty confident. We've got this thing called life under control. Sometimes it takes the tough, hard times to put our focus back on Jesus. We start sinking, and our Christian instincts take over. We do the only thing we can do, we cry out to Jesus.

Trouble gives us a reason to worship Jesus. When all is said and done, all the disciples could do was worship

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Jesus. They had seen him do many marvelous things. But they got a complete picture of Jesus when they saw him come through in their trouble. They could do nothing but acknowledge just how awesome and mighty he was. His rescue brought them to spontaneous worship. We can worship Jesus when things are good. But we can't really know the extent of Jesus's greatness until we experience his rescue. It's at that point that we finally, fully realize who our Lord and Savior is.

So, what are some of the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in Matthew? Our question was, “Is there any redeeming value to problems, troubles, and fear in our lives?” The answer is “Yes”, there is value in our problems, fears and troubles. God will use them positively. He even allows them for our good, to bring us to the end of ourselves, to focus on him, and to give us new reasons to worship him.

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Are you going through hard times now? Maybe God allowed those hard times into your life. Maybe he wants to bring you to the end of yourself. Maybe he's trying to get you to focus on him. And maybe you'll have new reasons to worship our Great and Awesome Lord.

Please bow your heads as I pray. Loving Father, we give you praise and thank you for your tender

mercy. As we are faced with the troubles of our lives, help us to realize that no matter what happens, you are near to us at all times, working all things together to help mature our faith. Thank you that you are in control of every single circumstance of life, no matter how difficult, dangerous, or distressing such times may become. Keep our hearts from doubting your Word, and help us to trust you in all things. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**